
Great Plains' Salvation: Coal-Based Fighter Fuel?

The beleaguered Great Plains Coal Gasification project, which industrial sponsors abandoned last August in the face of White House opposition to providing price supports, will not die easily. While the Department of Energy plans to decide next spring whether to cease operating the sprawling synfuels plant, there is a move afoot in Congress to modify the \$2-billion facility to provide the Department of Defense with synthetic jet fuel.

Senator Mark Andrews (R-N.D.) has amended the Defense appropriations bill for fiscal year 1986 to require that DOD purchase 10,000 barrels per day of coal-based jet fuel, if it is available at competitive prices. Of course Andrews hopes that the fuel can be supplied by the Great Plains plant, which employs 931 North Dakota citizens. His amendment provides \$4.5 million for research to structure and test a coal-based fuel that is compatible with military jet turbines.

The senator also has managed to enlist the support of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. The attraction of the fuel is twofold: it provides a nonpetroleum supply source; and when enriched, its Btu value is lifted enough to extend aircraft flight ranges up to 10 percent, industry and DOD officials note. DOD has been dabbling in coal-based fuels for years, but the Great Plains facility presents it with the first opportunity to obtain sizeable quantities of the fuel on a sustainable basis. The plant's gas production capacity is the equivalent of 22,000 barrels of oil per day.

Officials of the Defense Fuel Supply Center and the Air Force's synthetic fuels program at Wright Patterson Air Force Base already have inspected the Beulah, North Dakota, plant. And DFSC officials have begun drafting contract solicitations. But actual production of the coal-based fuel is really years away, if it happens at all. Andrews's legislation is to focus attention on ensuring the continued operation of the nation's only commercial-scale synthetic fuels plant.

To produce coal-based fuel, Andrews estimates that \$175 million in modifications taking 18 months would be required. The capital improve-

ments, he notes, could be financed by the plant operator, if a long-term contract were available. Still, there remains the question of whether DOE, which now owns the plant, will lease or sell it at a price that can make producing jet fuel economical.

Revenues from production of high-Btu gas now cover all operating expenses. But supply contracts are being contested by purchasers who say the price is too high—now about \$2 per thousand cubic feet above market rates. If the plant operator cannot continue to command the current rate of about \$5.60 per thousand cubic feet or higher, it is doubtful that Great Plains would generate enough revenue to be operated profitably by a private concern. Officials of American Natural Gas, the operating company now owned by DOE, are slated to outline the economics of jet fuel production in a presentation to DOE soon.—**MARK CRAWFORD**

Congress Eyes Changes to U.S.-China Nuke Pact

The Reagan Administration's "Agreement for Nuclear Cooperation" with the Peoples Republic of China has been amended by the Senate and House foreign affairs committees. The action comes in the wake of concerns raised in both Houses in recent months about weak language in the agreement's nonproliferation safeguard provisions. But the two committees' actions will be moot if trade pact amendments do not make it to the Senate and House floors for a vote before 11 December—and that appears doubtful. Unless altered by Congress, under law the treaty automatically takes effect then as originally drafted.

The pending amendments to the agreement would delay exports of civilian nuclear goods to China for 30 days, pending receipt by the President of stronger written assurances from the Chinese government that the technology will not be transferred to other parties for weapons purposes. The amendment was worked out by Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), Senate minority whip; Senator Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; and the State De-

partment. But it is regarded by both critics and supporters of the nuclear pact as a minor concession to Cranston, who on 21 October raised questions about China's discussions with Iran concerning nuclear trade.

The Administration has fought efforts to alter the treaty, which President Reagan sent to Congress 24 July, stating that China has met the legal requirements of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act. Senator John Glenn (D-Ohio) and Cranston have pushed for more detailed safeguard language from the Chinese. They have argued that the loose wording accepted by the Administration will make it more difficult to impose tougher restrictions on nonnuclear weapons countries in the future.

—**MARK CRAWFORD**

United States May Drop All Support of Unesco

The Senate Appropriations Committee has voted to eliminate a proposed \$2.75 million for the support of Unesco from the State Department budget, thus arousing fears that this country may drop all connection to international scientific programs funded through that agency.

Last year the United States dropped out of Unesco, to which it was contributing \$49 million a year. Congress authorized \$2.75 million as a voluntary contribution. The House voted an appropriation of \$2.28 million, reflecting an across-the-board cut of 17 percent in the foreign aid bill.

The House-Senate conference is to meet in early December. According to a State Department official, the money represents a "small token contribution to pay for our participation in programs important to United States interests"—such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Universal Copyright Convention. Philip Hemily of the National Academy of Sciences, which is still trying to work out ways for limited United States participation in Unesco-supported activities, says the failure to appropriate anything would be "embarrassing" to the United States and "really will harm our international science interests."

—**CONSTANCE HOLDEN**